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Swahili and Swahili poetry in Lubumbashi: The language and lyrics of Sando Marteau

Abstract

The article introduces the singer and poet from Lubumbashi, known under the artistic name of Sando Marteau, and presents some of the poet's lyrics. These texts serve as the basis of an exposition of the variety of Swahili spoken in Katanga, "Lubumbashi Swahili" or "Katanga/Shaba Swahili". This article presents several songs with translations into English and lists those linguistic features in them that are common in or even specific to "Lubumbashi Swahili". Sando Marteau's songs show the broad spectrum of the linguistic continuum of "Lubumbashi Swahili". While many songs remain close to "Swahili bora", a variety of Congolese Swahili close to the East African "Standard Swahili", other songs freely employ "Lubumbashi Swahili". This distinction reflects the artist's conscious choice; indeed, he opts for "Lubumbashi Swahili" especially in songs expressive of local cultural contexts. A further interesting feature of Sando Marteau's Swahili is his idiosyncratic disjunctive orthography, different from how the language is written in East Africa and in the DRC. In terms of lexicon, Sando Marteau's Swahili avoids the practice of code-switching that is otherwise exceedingly common in the Katanga region. A proper understanding of Sando Marteau's language facilitates an appreciation of the beauty and power of his poetry.

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1. Introduction

Sando Marteau is a performing artist living in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). He is one of the very few Congolese poets who consistently employ Swahili for their compositions. Full of melancholy tones, Sando Marteau's beautiful, deep songs speak out the pain and malaise of contemporary Congolese society, but they equally address the general situation of the human being in the world.

This article focuses on the linguistic dimension of Sando Marteau's sung poetry. It first describes the standing of Swahili in the DRC, concentrating especially on the area of Katanga. Then it clarifies the role of Swahili in the verbal arts in Lubumbashi. The following section presents several songs with translations into English and a brief discussion of their linguistic features as well as aspects of their content. The article is descriptive with respect to the linguistic features, with a focus on specific texts by Sando Marteau; it does not aspire to propose hypotheses about the origin and development of these features or consider diachronic

developments, nor does it venture into comparative linguistics and identify similarities across Bantu languages.

2. Swahili in the DRC¹

Swahili is spoken in the eastern and southern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It is one of the four national languages with the largest number of speakers, alongside Lingala, Ciluba, and Kikongo and, next to Lingala, also one of the two African languages that act as *lingua franca* in the DRC, attracting speakers with other ethnic languages. Studies on Swahili language and literature mostly focus on East African Swahili. If Swahili spoken in the Congo is mentioned at all in these works, it is often referred to as “Congolese Swahili” or “Kingwana”, i.e. a single “dialect” of Swahili (Whiteley et al. 1956, Chiraghdin & Mnyampala 1977). Mugane’s recent history of Swahili speaks of the “Katangese (...) dialect called Shaba Swahili” as “a name that replaced earlier labels including Katanga Swahili, Congo Swahili, and Kingwana Swahili” (2015: 195), as though all of these were coextensive terms. However, the Swahili spoken in the DRC is a broad continuum of varieties. The fundamental divisions are both geographical and sociolinguistic: Katanga Swahili is opposed to Bukavu Swahili, and Swahili bora is opposed to the Swahili spoken in the street (see Ricard 2009; Ferrari, Kalunga, and Mulumbwa 2014).

The Katangese varieties of Swahili have been the subject of studies detailing the history of the region and the sociolinguistic status as well as the linguistic qualities of the languages spoken there (Polomé 1963, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1971a, 1971b, 1985; Kalunga Mwela-Ubi 1979; Schicho 1980, 1982, 1988, 1992; Fabian 1991; Gysels 1992; de Rooij 2007; Kapanga 2001; Ferrari 2012; Ferrari, Kalunga and Mulumbwa 2014). Bukavu Swahili is described in Wilt (1988) and Nassenstein and Bose (2016), and additional insights concerning the linguistic situation in Kivu and Maniema can be gained from Goyvaerts (1988, 1995). Transcriptions of oral materials as well as some written materials in Katanga Swahili are available in Schicho (1981, 1985) and Fabian (1990a and 1990b), as well as on the website maintained by de Rooij (De Rooij 2010). The information derived from these sources has been compared with the current situation in Lubumbashi during fieldwork in February 2009.

¹ This section revises and expands section I.1. in Rettová 2013.

2.1. Spread of Swahili in the Congo

Swahili spread in the Katanga region in pre-colonial times due to the “penetration of partly Swahilized raiders and hunters from up-country Tanzania, the waSumbwa” or Bayeke, a part of the Nyamwezi ethnic group from West Tanzania, which led to the “establishment of the kingdom of Garengaze by one of them, Msiri, whose capital, Bunkeya, became a major trade center [where] Arabs, and waSwahili from the East would meet Portuguese **pombeiros** from the west” (Polomé 1985: 47, bold type in the original). The position of Swahili was reinforced by the Belgians, who occupied the region since 1885 and conquered Msiri in 1891, because they recruited most of their soldiers in Zanzibar.

The city of Elisabethville was founded in 1909 to serve as an administrative basis for the nearby copper mines and copper-processing plants, run by the Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK, founded in 1906). Labor was recruited from the whole area of Katanga as well as the neighboring regions of the Kasayi, from Ruanda and Urundi, and from Northern Rhodesia. In 1931, a new political unit, the *centre extra-coutumier*, replaced the workers’ camps and the *cité indigène* (the spontaneous settlements surrounding the workers’ camps), where the migrant workers had lived until then. The inhabitants of the *centre extra-coutumier* were given a special legal status and were allowed to constitute a semi-autonomous administrative unit with special urban courts of law and a town council (Polomé 1971a: 366). This gave rise to a more stable population of African immigrants, which continued growing in size. In 1947 there were 62,397 Africans in Elisabethville, compared to 6,282 Africans in 1934. By 1957 the number had risen to 143,000 Africans, and in the 1970s the city had around 500,000 inhabitants. The Europeans numbered 6,242 in 1947 and 14,000 in 1957 (Polomé 1985: 48). Currently the city has about 1,500,000 inhabitants (on the history of Lubumbashi, see Fabian 1990b, Jewsiewicki, Dibwe dia Mwembu and Giordano 2010, Amuri Mapala-Lutebele 2013).

Swahili was the language of communication in the mining industry and in the factories and the main administrative language, but also the language of the Church, and the language of education in some mission schools. It soon replaced the other African languages spoken in the private sphere of life. In the 1950s families still used their ethnic languages at home, but the second-generation inhabitants of Lubumbashi started using Swahili as their first language. Still, the general level of education in Swahili rarely reached beyond primary school and literacy in the language remained poor compared to other regions of the DRC, where the influence of East Coast Swahili was stronger and schooling in the language deeper and more advanced (Polomé 1985: 49).

This is particularly the case with the Bukavu form of Swahili, spoken in the provinces of Kivu and Maniema and the surrounding areas. The Kivu form of Swahili originates in the 19th-century Arab ivory and slave traffic in the Eastern regions of the Congo, represented by the emblematic personality of Tippu Tip. It is this form that is usually referred to as “Congolese Swahili” or as “Kingwana”—the language of the Wangwana, “the civilized upper class” of Swahili society (Polomé 1963: 503, Whitehead and Whitehead 1928). In the Congo the Wangwana would be “anyone working for the Arabo-Swahili traders” (Wilt 1988: 4). However, as Wilt (1988: 5) states, the term Kingwana is virtually unknown to the speakers themselves and is not spontaneously used by anyone to refer to the language they speak.

The form of Swahili spoken in the south of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, called “Katanga/Shaba Swahili” or “Lubumbashi Swahili”, is often characterized as a Creole which arose from extensive language contact between Coastal Swahili and languages spoken in the Congo and became the first language to its speakers (Polomé 1971b, Fabian 1991: 110f.). This widespread opinion has been criticized by Wilt, who suggested a more complex view regarding the linguistic status of the varieties of Swahili in the DCR within an integrated framework employing the concepts of creolization and linguistic continuum, koineization, di- and polyglossia (1988: 12ff.). The strongest linguistic influences on Katanga Swahili were the Bantu languages of the Katanga and Kasayi regions, in particular Ciluba and Icibemba, and European languages such as French, with some words adapted from Dutch, Portuguese, and English (Polomé 1971a: 371; on grammatical borrowing, see de Rooij 2007).

Lubumbashi Swahili or **Katanga (Shaba) Swahili** is the form of the language used in the area of Katanga, in particular in the urban centers of Lubumbashi and Likasi (respectively Elisabethville and Jadotville during colonial times and in the early years after independence). This was originally the language of workers in the mines and it reflects a rich mixture of influences, giving rise to a broad range of varieties: there is no single and unified form of Katanga Swahili. It is a continuum with two extremes which may coexist even in the language of a single person, who employs the colloquial form in everyday discourse and a form closer to Swahili bora in more formal situations. There is an awareness that the spoken form of Swahili is “bad” (“Swahili (m)baya”) and speakers often consciously try to speak “better” to foreigners, trying to avoid the typical features of Katanga Swahili (for example replacing *ba-* with *wa-*, using Standard Swahili/Swahili bora forms of words, e.g. *-angalia* instead of *-angaria*, avoiding French loan words, etc.).

Bukavu Swahili is closer to Swahili bora than Katanga Swahili. It is the form of Swahili usually referred to as **Kingwana** in older literature (referring to the language of Arab slave owners in the Central Congo).

Swahili bora is not the same as the East African norm of the language, **Standard Swahili** (*Kiswahili Sanifu*). It rather stands at the end of the linguistic continuum of Katanga Swahili which is closest to East African Swahili and the Swahili speakers in the Congo certainly associate it with the latter. However, Swahili bora retains features typical in the Congolese forms of Swahili, for example, the use of the prefixes of the locative classes 16, 17 and 18 as prepositions (e.g. *ku* in the meaning of “to”, e.g. *kwenda ku soko* “go to the market”, *mu* in the meaning of “in, at”, e.g. *mu Congo* “in the Congo”).

2.2. Writing Swahili in Lubumbashi

Swahili is an almost exclusively spoken language in Lubumbashi. Swahili bora is employed for specific purposes, in particular for religious service and in the media. Katanga Swahili is used in all other areas of life. Both Swahili bora and Katanga Swahili are used in inscriptions, often alongside French. Advertisements, posters, and billboards, with their popular appeal, employ predominantly Katanga Swahili and French.

In general, French is used for writing. Texts by Congolese authors that are sold in bookshops in Lubumbashi are predominantly in French. Creative writing, mainly novels, is in French. The rare examples of written Swahili are in Swahili bora, not the spoken form of the language, and they mostly deal with religious topics, agriculture or health. The single exception is the *Calendrier Fore-Fore* (see also Le Lay 2013). The calendar is trilingual; it uses Swahili, French, and Lingala and the Swahili corresponds to the spoken version of Lubumbashi Swahili. I would like to quote two examples to illustrate Lubumbashi Swahili from its 2009 edition. The section on agriculture for the month of January states:

Selon baspécialistes kutakuya crise ya byakula mu dunia nzima njo maana mukonaona bintu bikonapanda bei.

Lakini tunatumainia kwamba ile njala haitafika humu mwetu mu Katanga juu mweye balimaji mukwako na mukonafwata calendrier agricole ile tukonamipatia kila mwezi, n'est-ce pas ? Calendrier agricole ingine ni ile ilitungiwa na père Ghislain Jageneu, nayo muiuze itamisaidia sana mu makazi yenu, juu njala ishingiye mu Katanga.

According to experts, an alimentary crisis is coming in the entire world, which is why you can see prices going up.

But we hope that that famine will not reach us in Katanga, because you, farmers, are here and you are following the agricultural calendar that we provide for you every month, aren't you? Another agricultural calendar is that prepared by Father Ghislain Jageneu, you should buy that one, too; it will help you very much in your work so that the famine does not reach Katanga.

Typical features of Lubumbashi Swahili can be observed in this passage. These distinguish it from the Standard Swahili (*Kiswahili Sanifu*) of Tanzania, which is used here for comparison and referred to as Standard. Among the relevant features are:

- phonetic features: use of /y/ instead of /j/ (*kutakuya* instead of Standard *kutakuja* “it will come”), use of intervocalic /l/ (*njala* “hunger”), -shi- instead of -si- (*ishiingiye* “so that it may not enter”)
- the prefixes of noun classes 2 and 8 are *ba-* and *bi-*, e.g. *balimaji* “farmers”, *byakula* “food”
- the object prefix for 2nd person plural is -mi- (*tukonamipatia* “we provide for you”) and the independent personal pronoun is *mweye* “you (pl.)”
- the prefix -ko- inserted into verbal forms in the present tense (*mukonaona* “you can see”, *bikonapanda* “they are rising”, *tukonamipatia* “we provide for you”)
- the prefixes of the locative classes used as prepositions (*mu dunia nzima* “in the entire world”, *mu Katanga* “in Katanga”)
- frequent use of French words, occasionally with Swahili noun-class prefixes (*selon* “according to”, *baspécialistes* “experts, specialists”, *crise* “crisis”, *n'est-ce pas* “isn't it, aren't you”, etc.)
- specific lexical uses (e.g. *juu* used in the meaning of “because (of)” (*juu mweye balimaji mukwako*, “because you farmers are here/there”), -uza in the meaning of “to buy” (*muiuze*, “you (pl.) should buy it”)
- demonstrative pronouns used in relative forms, entirely replacing the Standard Swahili synthetic relative forms as well as the relative forms with *amba-* (*calendrier agricole ile tukonamipatia kila mwezi*, “the agricultural calendar that we provide for you every month”)

The agricultural section for the month of February says:

Bamingi kati yenu baririma na bengine baririmisha, félicitations ! Sasa mutengenez² mabalabala ju ya kufaciliter transport ya bile byote muririma. (...)

Mupariye (sarcler) ndani ya mashamba ya kalanga avant ma fleurs itoke. Parce que kama mauwa ishakutoka njo unapariya récolte itapunguka.

Many of you cultivate and others have their plots cultivated, congratulations! Now repair the roads to facilitate the transport of all that you have produced. (...)

Weed your fields of peanuts before they start blossoming, because if you weed only when the blossoms have appeared, the harvest will be smaller.

Next to the features mentioned above, we can add the following observations:

- the use of /r/ instead of /l/ (*baririma* instead of Standard *walilima* “they cultivated, they farmed”, *mupariye* instead of Standard *m(u)palie* “you should weed”) and the use of /l/ for /r/ (*kalanga*, *mabalabala* for Standard *karanga* “peanuts”, *mabarabara* “roads”)
- lacking orthographic standard (*ju* next to *juu* “in order to, because of”, writing of Swahili prefixes together with French words or separately to keep the visual form of the French word intact (*kufaciliter* “to facilitate” vs. *ma fleurs* “blossoms”)
- special meaning of *njo* as “and then” (*kama mauwa ishakutoka njo unapariya* “if the flowers have already appeared and then you weed, if you only weed when the blossoms have appeared”)
- an uncertainty about the readers’ lexical competence: the author has written the French word “sarcler” behind the Swahili word *-pariya* (Standard *-palia*, “to weed”), possibly because it is assumed that the readers will have used the French word more often than the Swahili word; it is interesting that French words dominate even the agricultural sphere (e.g. *récolte* “harvest”, *sarcler* “to weed”, *fleurs* “blossoms”)

The *Calendrier* employs the conjunctive orthography, as does Standard Swahili. It is quite remote from Standard Swahili in terms of morphology, and the frequency of French loan words is very high. This contrasts with the idiosyncratic orthography of Sando Marteau, the greater

² *Sic*; this form gives the impression of the French 2nd person plural imperative, but it is probably a typographic error: the word should read *mutengeneze*.

proximity of his language to standard morphology, and especially with the striking absence or extreme scarcity of loan words in his poetry.

2.3. Swahili in verbal arts in Lubumbashi

The artists in Lubumbashi who made the local form of Swahili famous were the Mufwankolo theatre group. The fame that the group has acquired outside the DRC is due to two books: Schicho (1981) and Fabian (1990a; the texts are also available online, see De Rooij 2010). The productions of the actor group Mufwankolo are usually monolingual, employing Katanga Swahili. The theatrical sketches of the actors are oral and improvised, but they also include short texts in prose, which are written before the performance and elucidate the “moral of the story”. The members of the group also prepare feuilletons for Radio Mwangaza (Le Lay 2008, 2010, 2014).

Many verbal artists employing Swahili in Lubumbashi are bilingual in French and Swahili and many are fascinated and inspired by the coastal Swahili culture and also strive to employ the Tanzanian form of Swahili. Sumba Maly has authored an unpublished collection of poetry, *Uhai*, in which the poet uses Swahili bora. Huit Mulongo published a collection called *Utenzi* in Paris in 1990, again inspired by Coastal Swahili culture. Patrick Mudekereza is the author of many texts in French, as well as bilingual texts employing both French and Swahili, sometimes employing also code-switching. Salomon Shingaleta frequently uses code-switching in his novel *Kas le méchant*; the Swahili sentences in the novel are true to the spoken form of Lubumbashi Swahili (Le Lay 2008, 2010, 2014).

3. Linguistic features in Sando Marteau’s Swahili

3.1. Introducing the artist

Sando Marteau³ is the artistic name of Jean Papy Kabange Numbi (born 1973). His work has been studied by Le Lay (2008, 2010, 2014), Ferrari (2011), Ferrari, Kalunga and Mulumbwa (2014), and Rettová (2013 and 2015). He is a poet and a singer, but he also acts in the plays of the group Mufwankolo. He often sings accompanied by only the acoustic guitar, but sometimes performs with his band, Mujik-A-Kwetu. He places himself in the tradition of Katanga music

³ The name is a semantic reduplication. The word *sando* means “hammer” in Congolese Swahili (Standard Swahili for “hammer” is *nyundo*), as does “marteau” in French.

(Jewsiewicki 2003, Wald undated, Cagnolari 2005, Johnston 2005-2010); but, in fact, his music is very distinct from this tradition in its emphasis on philosophical and political themes and its overriding pessimism. Rettová calls him “an isolated phenomenon in the Katangese context” (2015: 364) and speaks of the artist’s “implicit existentialism” (2013, 2015, 2016).

Much of Sando Marteau’s poetry derives from his moving personal history. As a young man he was recruited by Mobutu, and then he spent 13 months on the frontline in Kabila’s army. His poetry is politically engaged. His music is motivated by a strong desire to serve his country; he recognizes that much of current and past Congolese politics and leadership have been misguided (email interviews with the artist from 17 and 21 January 2010). He is the author of the lyrics of his songs, but, as he says, they do not only represent his own opinions. He wants to leave a trace in the world through his music. The themes are taken from his active life, and he wishes to “éduquer, former, informer et divertir la masse en espérant rendre au monde sa vraie couleur” (email interview from 17 January 2010).

Swahili is Sando Marteau’s first language: “le swahili est ma langue maternelle, la seule langue que je parle sans complexe devant qui que ce soit” (email interview from 17 January 2010) and he is proud to be “le seul artiste musicien katangais qui a redonné de la valeur à la langue swahili” (email interview from 17 January 2010). But he is fluent in other African languages and obviously in French; he also learnt English at school. In the corpus of 76 songs authored by Sando Marteau between 1996 and 2010 which is the basis of this research, the majority of the songs are in Swahili, but the poet also uses French (7 songs) and Lingala (10 songs). In addition, there are short sequences in Kiluba and words or phrases in English in several songs.

3.2. Linguistic features of Sando Marteau’s song lyrics⁴

Sando Marteau’s Swahili exhibits the whole range of the linguistic continuum of Lubumbashi Swahili. Most songs are close to Swahili bora, but they exhibit some idiosyncratic features, in particular his orthography. The features listed below are not found in every occurrence of a specific orthographic, phonetic, morphological or syntactic environment, much as the artist’s language varies in different songs and even in different places within a single song. The following overview is not exhaustive with respect to Lubumbashi Swahili, nor with respect to

⁴ Section 3.2. is based on data found in section I.2.3. in Rettová 2013.

Sando Marteau's Swahili, but it covers the salient features of Lubumbashi Swahili found in the corpus of song lyrics which is at my disposal.

Orthography⁵

Sando Marteau uses a largely disjunctive spelling, which is neither that of Standard Swahili nor that of the written forms of Swahili used in the Congo (i.e. Swahili bora or the rare examples of written Lubumbashi Swahili). Distributed predominantly through oral channels (religious sermons, radio, TV), Lubumbashi Swahili has no written standard. In addition to the idiosyncratic spelling, Sando Marteau's spelling of Swahili is also influenced by French orthography:

- mute <h> is often inserted in places of hiatus (*waho* for Standard *wao* "they")
- <tsh> is the spelling of the Standard <ch>
- <dj> is used for <j>

Phonology

The artist's language shows some of the typical features of Lubumbashi Swahili:

- /k/ is sometimes used instead of /g/, e.g. *nduku* "brother(s)", *kupika* "to hit", *bukari* (Standard *ugali*) "(maize or manioc) porridge, fufu"
- the phonemes /r/ and /l/ are sometimes used interchangeably (*buluma* occurs in the texts next to *uruma*, Standard *huruma* "compassion")
- <j> represents the phoneme /z/, e.g. *mweji* (Standard *mwezi* "moon, month")
- the Arabic phoneme /dh/ is rendered by /z/ (e.g. *zarau* "contempt", Standard *dharau*)

⁵ In the songs quoted in this article, I have kept Sando Marteau's orthography, except for cases of typographic errors (the controversial cases were consulted with the artist). However, I have used capital letters for names of nations, e.g. *wa Arabu* "Arabs" or *Wacongo* "the Congolese" (respectively in "Afrika ni maziwa" and "Nguvu ya inchi"). I have not tried to unify inconsistencies in spelling in such cases as /k/ or /g/, e.g. *wali pikwa* and *wali pigana* (in "Afrika ni maziwa"), /si/ or /shi/, e.g. *ashi pime* and *asi pime* ("Nguvu ya inchi"), etc., as these, too, are emblematic of the unstable character of Katanga Swahili. All the translations of the song lyrics into English are mine.

- the phoneme /w/ is sometimes rendered as /b/ or a coexistence of both can be observed, e.g. *Afrika ni maziwa* “Africa is milk”, but *wali nyonya majiba* “they sucked the breasts” (song “Afrika ni maziwa”)⁶
- /h/ is often left out in both spelling and pronunciation, e.g. *uruma* (“compassion”, Standard *huruma*), *uzuni* (“sadness”, Standard *huzuni*), *eshima* (“respect”, Standard *heshima*), *atari* (“danger”, Standard *hatari*)
- -si- is palatalized as -shi-, e.g. *mama wa shipo kufunda* “uneducated mother” (song “Kwetu mbali”; *wa* is the genitive particle, not a subject marker, the expression is in the singular)
- class 9/10 prefixes *i-* to the initial nasal if accent is placed on this nasal, e.g. *inchi* (“country”, Standard *nchi*), *imbwa* (“dog”, Standard *mbwa*)

Morphology

Typical features of Lubumbashi Swahili can be observed in the artist’s language in the morphology of noun classes and their prefixes and concords:

- class 1 and 3 have the form of the noun prefix *mu-*, e.g. *mutu* “person” (Standard *mtu*), *mutshi* “tree” (Standard *mti*, song “Mama wa Wacongamani”)
- class 2 has the prefix *ba-*, e.g. *batu* (however, the artist also uses *wa-*) “people” (Standard *watu*)
- class 8 has the prefix *bi-*, e.g. *bingine* “others” (Standard *vingine*)
- class 11/14 preserves the separation into the two classes, e.g. *lufu* “death” (Standard has *kifo* in class 7/8 although *ufu* “being dead” exists), *lwendo* “journey, travel” (Standard has *mwendo* class 3/4), and *butamu* “sweetness” (Standard *utamu*)
- noun class prefixes in nouns and verbal or adjectival concords are often not strictly aligned, e.g. *mutu yote* next to *mutu wote* (“everyone, every person”; Standard would use *kila mtu* “everyone” or *mtu yeyote* “anyone”)
- as typical of Congolese Swahili, *ku* and *mu* are used respectively in the meaning of “to, at” and “in”

⁶ *Maziwa* means both “milk” and “breasts.”

- *-mo* or *-ko* suffixed to verbs⁷ means “there,” e.g. *wali oneyamo* “they felt/saw in there” (song “Mama wa Wacongomani”), *baki ku pendeko*, *baki ku tapeko* “if they like you there, if they praise you there” (song “Kwetu mbali”)⁸

Verbal morphology shows even more striking differences between Lubumbashi Swahili and Standard Swahili, in subject and object concords, TAM markers, and other prefixes and endings:

- the subject concord of the 1st person singular in the present, past and future tenses is *mi-* (Standard *ni-*), e.g. *mili zalikwa* (also *miri zalikwa*, “I was born”), *mita fariki* “I will die” (song “Siku ya maisha yangu”), *mina taka* “I want” (song “Wawawe”)
- the object concord of the 2nd person plural is *-mu-* or *-mi-*, e.g. *mite mi pikiya simu kwa ku mijulisha* “I will call you by telephone to let you know” (song “Wawawe”)
- the present negative, the hypothetical *-ki-* tense, but also the future *-ta-*, have final *-e* (Standard *-a*) like the subjunctive, e.g. *a tshokake* “he is not tired” (song “Siku ya maisha yangu”, the Standard form would be *hachoki*, but it has a different meaning “he is never tired”), *ai kuwe* “it is not” (Standard would be *haiwi*, but this is rarely used), *uki ende mbiyo* “if you run, if you rush” (Standard *ukienda mbio*; all three examples are from the song “Haraka haraka”), *mita ende lwangu* “I will go my way” (Standard *nitaenda zangu*, song “Wawawe”)
- the suffix *-ka* is used with a habitual meaning, e.g. *mafikili yangu ina zungulukaka* “my mind always/usually goes around (something)” (song “Mama Afrika”, see below) or the form *a tshokake* above
- the prefix *-i-* is inserted in front of verbal stems in infinitives and imperatives, e.g. *fasi yako ya ku ikala na sila yako* “your place to be and your weapon” (song “Nguvu ya inchi”)

⁷ Schadeberg (2003: 152) calls these “locative substitutives.”

⁸ According to Marcel Kalunga and Maud Devos (2014), the suffix *-ko* has three functions. It can be a locative marker as in the examples above; it can be an object marker for class 12, e.g. “*kale kakitu, fichikako* ‘ce petit objet, cache-le’” (2014 : Powerpoint slide 12); and it can be a “suffixe atténuatif,” for which Kalunga and Devos give these two examples: “*semako na nguvu* ‘parle un peu plus fort’; *sema na nguvuko* ‘parle un peu plus fort’” (2014: slide 12). Ferrari (2011 and 2014) reduces these functions to the third one, even in cases where the locative meaning seems to be more appropriate, see song “Kwetu mbali” below.

Lexical features

Sando Marteau's Swahili has very few French loan words and avoids the code-switching typical of spoken Swahili in Lubumbashi. Occasionally the author intentionally mixes languages, e.g. in the song "11ème commandement", where Swahili citations are inserted into a Lingala text, or in the song "Kwetu mbali", with a stanza in Kiluba.

4. Selected songs

The song called "Baraka yetu" was composed on 4 May 2007:

Baraka yetu

Baraka yetu ita toka wapi,
ku kinga, ku linda wa zee wetu.

Wa zee kule weko, ndjo kule tuna kwenda,
vijana uku tuko ndjo kule wali toka
na mule mote wata pita, tune itaji ku pita
lakini tuji ulize kama tuta fika kule weko baba?
Wa kubwa wa kale waho wali sema
"Mu kinwa ya mutu mu zee muna nunka
lakini muna toka mambo ya kweli,
ndugu sikiliza".

E baba na we mama,
ndugu kijana, tu eshimu wa zee, tuwa kinge vizuri,
kwani kule weko, ndjo kule tuna kwenda,
vijana uku tuko ndjo kule wali toka
na mule mote wata pita, tune itaji ku pita
lakini tuji ulize kama tuta fika kule weko oo.

Bu zee ni baraka ya Mungu,
bu zee abu kuje kwa haraka,
invu ku kitsha ni baraka ya Mungu,
mukulu wa tatu au kuje kwa haraka,

bu zee si tamani tena kitu,
bu zee neji sau mwenyewe,
bu zee na kuwa mutu wa watu,
ku Afrika wata ni ita ka lozi,
wengine wata ni ita ka tshawi,
lakini ku Bulaya wata ni tshunga vizuri,
wengine niku ni atsha munyewe,
wengine niku niuwa kwa upesi,
mimi kijana nami na tamani kuzeka,
kwani bu zee ni baraka ya Mungu uu,
bu zee, bu zee, bu zee.

Our blessing

*Where will our blessing come from?
From protecting, from defending our elders.*

*Where the elders are, is where we are going,
we, the young ones, where we are, that is where they came from
and wherever they pass, we have to pass,
but let's ask ourselves whether we arrive where our ancestors are?
The elders of the past said,
"The mouth of an old man stinks,
but the truth comes out of it,
listen, my friend."*

*Father and mother,
my young friend, let us respect the elders, let us protect them well,
because where they are, is where we are going,
we, the young ones, where we are, that is where they came from
and wherever they pass, we have to pass,
but let's ask ourselves whether we arrive where they are, o-o.*

Old age is a blessing from God,

*old age does not come quickly,
white hair on the head is a blessing from God,
the third leg⁹ does not come quickly,
old age means I don't desire anything anymore,
old age means I forget myself,
old age means I am dependent on other people,
in Africa they will call me a wizard,
others will call me a sorcerer,
but in Europe they will take good care of me,
others will leave me alone,
others will kill me quickly,
I, a youth, also wish to grow old,
because old age is a blessing from God,
old age, old age, old age.*

The song describes the circle of life: we are moving where the elders/ancestors are now, they were before where we are now. Elders are the signposts on the young people's journey through life and should be protected and given due respect. This will help the young to receive, one day, that blessing that the elders have received: reaching an advanced age. Old age is seen as God's gift by the poet, for it brings wisdom, the extinction of self-interest and desire. Unfortunately, old age comes at the cost of total dependence on others. Society treats old people in different ways, good and bad: In African societies they may be labelled witches (*kalozi*, *katshaw*); in Europe they are sometimes treated well, but sometimes neglected by their families and left on their own, and sometimes they are even killed "quickly", which is a reference to the practice of euthanasia.

On the side of language, except for Sando Marteau's idiosyncratic disjunctive spelling, and for the practice of writing the glides (e.g. *u pitie*, Standard *upitie* "you should/must pass"), the following features of Lubumbashi Swahili can be observed in this song:

- expression of relative clauses: *kule weko* "where they are", *kule tuna kwenda* "where we are going", *uku tuko* "where we are", *kule wali toka* "where they came from", *mule mote wata pita* "everywhere that they will pass"

⁹ i.e. walking stick.

- the use of *ndjo* is in line with Standard Swahili and has an emphatic meaning (“it is (indeed)...”)
- the hiatus in pronunciation is covered with silent <h> *waho* (Standard *wao*) “they”
- locative class prefixes are used as prepositions: *mu kinwa* “in the mouth”, *ku kitsha* “on the head”
- the class 1 prefix *m-* is *mu-*: *mutu mu zee* “an elder”
- the concords are not observed strictly: *kinwa ya mutu* “a person’s mouth” (Standard *kinywa cha mtu*)
- the final -ka is prenasalized: *-nunka* “to stink” (Standard *-nuka*)
- /h/ is silent: *-eshimu* “to respect” (Standard *-heshimu*), *neji sau* “I forget myself” (Standard *ninajisahau*)
- spelling <tsh> for Standard <ch>, e.g. *kitsha* “head” (Standard *kichwa*)
- negative forms end in -e *abu kuje, aukuje* “it does not come”
- /k/ for Standard /g/ *mukulu* “leg” (Standard *mguu*)
- intervocalic /l/ is used, as in *mukulu* vs. Standard *mguu*
- use of class 12 *ka lozi, ka tshawwi* (deprecativ meaning of the diminutive); this class does not exist in Standard Swahili but is used in many areas of the Swahili territory
- class 14 retains *bu-*, e.g. *Bulaya* “Europe” (Standard *Ulaya*), *bu zee* “old age” (Standard *uzee*)

The historical plight of Africa, followed by an equally difficult modernity, is depicted in the song “Africa ni maziwa”, composed on 8 January 2009:

Afrika ni maziwa

Wa Arabu wali kuya Afrika
muku tafuta mali kote Afrika,
lakini wali nyonya majiba ya mama Afrika,
wote wali levika,
waka anza ku tshukuwa wana Afrika
kwenda kuwa uzisha kule Amerika,
pale Gorée wana Afrika wali faliki.

Yoyo mama

i bulanda, i bulanda, i bulanda, i bulanda.¹⁰

Wazungu wali kuya Afrika

muku tafuta mali kote Afrika,

lakini wali nyonya majiba ya mama Afrika,

wote wali levika,

wali sema wata baki milele Afrika

ju yaku wafundisha wana Afrika,

lakini mababu wetu wali pikwa kama nyama,

kisha viote via wa kambo vili kuwa ni ulozi.

Yoyo mama

i bulanda, i bulanda, i bulanda, i bulanda.

Mababu zetu wali pigana sana

ju ya uhuru ya Afrika,

kisha wote wali furahi,

kwani wana Afrika wali ongoza Afrika,

kisha vi ongozi viote via Afrika nao

wali nyonya majiba ya mama Afrika,

wote wali levika sana,

waka anza ku tesa wa ndugu zao,

magondwa, vita, njala vili tawala Afrika nzima.

Yoyo mama

i bulanda, i bulanda, i bulanda, i bulanda.

Africa is milk

Arabs came to Africa

searching for riches in all Africa,

¹⁰ Phrase in Kiluba, meaning “it is pitiful.”

*but they sucked the breasts of Mother Africa,
all of them got drunk,
they started taking Africans
to sell them in America,
Africans died in Gorée.¹¹*

*Ah mother,
it is pitiful, it is pitiful, it is pitiful.*

*Europeans came to Africa
searching for riches in all Africa,
but they sucked the breasts of Mother Africa,
all of them got drunk,
they said they would stay in Africa for ever
in order to educate Africans,
but our ancestors were beaten like animals,
and all that pertained to our grandfathers was called witchcraft.*

*Ah mother,
it is pitiful, it is pitiful, it is pitiful.*

*Our ancestors fought relentlessly
for the independence of Africa,
then they were all happy,
because Africans led Africa,
then all the leaders of Africa
also sucked the breasts of Mother Africa,
they all got drunk,
and they started hurting their brothers,
disease, war, and famine ruled the whole of Africa.*

Ah mother,

¹¹ An island on the coast of Senegal, from which slaves were shipped to America.

it is pitiful, it is pitiful, it is pitiful.

The text talks of the historical injustice that Africa has suffered—first Arab, then European exploitation. Eventually, when the continent reached independence, African political leaders did not behave any better than the foreign conquerors. The three waves of aggression directed against Africa are described using the same words and the same images: Arabs, Europeans, and Africans themselves sucked the breasts of “Mother Africa”, and were drunk from the sweet potion that flowed from them. The results differed only a little: slavery the first time,¹² cultural colonization concomitant with brutalizing Africans and deprecating their traditional culture the second time, and “disease, war, and famine” the third time. The song displays the following linguistic features:

- use of locative class prefixes as prepositions: *muku tafuta* “in searching”
- variations in spelling and pronunciation between *maziwa* and *majiba* “milk/breasts”
- lexical specificities of Katanga Swahili: *kuwa uzisha* “to sell them” (Standard *kuwauza*; in Congolese Swahili *kuzuza* means “to buy”), *wali levika* “they were drunk” (Standard *walilewa*), *kambo* “tradition”
- /l/ is used for /r/ *wali faliki* “they died” (Standard *walifariki*)
- code-switching with Kiluba *i bulanda* “it is pitiful”
- use of *ju(u)* in the sense of “because of”, *ju yaku wafundisha* “because of teaching them”
- inconsistent use of concords *mababu zetu* vs. *mababu wetu* “our ancestors”
- intervocalic /l/ *njala* “hunger”

The abuse of power by African leaders is the topic of a number of Sando Marteau’s songs. “Nguvu ya inchi” was composed on 6 November 2008:

Nguvu ya inchi

Askari mweni hodari miso nga,¹³
aduwi ashi pime ku ingiya,

¹² Historically, this is not accurate. It was European slave-traders who had their storage in Gorée. While the Arabian slave trade in Africa was atrocious, Arabs did not participate in the triangle trade—taking slaves to the Americas.

¹³ “Miso nga” is in Lingala, meaning “[have your] eyes open,” a slogan from the Mobutu period.

nini ni wa pima uyambe,
nini ni wa songa mbele.

Nguvu ya inchi askari na polise,
matsho ya inchi askari na polise,
mikono ya inchi askari na polise.

Askari na polise, rahiya aina aduwi wenu,
rahiya askari polise aina aduwi wako,
mukono kwa mukono tu jenge Congo,
mukono kwa mukono tu kinge.

Askari kazi yako niku kinga mipaka ya inchi,
aduwi asi pime ku ingiya
na kama ana ingiya mu nguvu
kazi yako niku mu fuguza mbali ya mipaka
ili rahiya a ishi kwa usalama.
Fasi yako ya ku ikala na sila yako
kama inchi iko mu ukimia
ni ndani ya vidjidji
na kama inchi iko mu ukimia
una paswa ku fanya kazi mbili
mbali ya maendeleo ya inchi yako.

Nguvu ya inchi askari na polise,
matsho ya inchi askari na polise,
mikono ya inchi askari na polise.

Polise kazi yako ni ku tshunga rahiya na mali yake,
ku eshimisa sheriya naku weka ukimia, usalama mali pote
ili wale weni nguvu wa si oneye wa siho nguvu.

Nguvu ya inchi askari na polise,
matsho ya inchi askari na polise,

mikono ya inchi askari na polise.

Askari na polise Wacongo

“Nini ni samaki na rahiha ni maji,
bila samaki maji ita ishi,
lakini bila maji samaki aita ishi.”

Kazi ya politik aiko yenu,
nini mu kinge mipaka,
mipango, rahiya na mali yake.

Nguvu ya inchi askari na polise,
matsho ya inchi askari na polise,
mikono ya inchi askari na polise.

The power of the country

*Brave soldier, be vigilant
so that the enemy does not try to enter,
you are daring,
you are eager to fight.*

*The power of the country is soldiers and police,
the eyes of the country are soldiers and police,
the hands of the country are soldiers and police.*

*Soldiers and policemen, citizens are not your enemies,
citizen, soldiers and policemen are not your enemies,
let us build the Congo hand in hand,
let us defend it hand in hand.*

*Soldier, your work is to protect the frontiers of the country,
so that the enemy does not dare to enter,
and if he enters by force,*

*your work is to drive him far away from the frontiers,
so that the citizen may live in security.
Your role is to stay with your weapon
when the country is in peace,
in villages,
and when the country is in peace,
you should participate in diverse activities
in developing your country.*

*The power of the country is soldiers and police,
the eyes of the country are soldiers and police,
the hands of the country are soldiers and police.*

*Policeman, your work is to watch over the citizen and his/her possessions,
to make people respect the law and to install peace and security everywhere,
so that those in power do not bully the powerless.*

*The power of the country is soldiers and police,
the eyes of the country are soldiers and police,
the hands of the country are soldiers and police.*

*Congolese soldiers and policemen,
“You are fish and the citizens are water,
without fish, the water can exist,
but without water, the fish won’t live.”*

*Politics is not your job,
you should defend the frontiers,
public order, the citizen and his/her possessions.*

*The power of the country is soldiers and police,
the eyes of the country are soldiers and police,
the hands of the country are soldiers and police.*

The song describes the importance of armed forces and the police for the well-being of a country. Clearly, a country needs to employ some means of military defense both on the international level and on the level of internal peace and security. However, the song does not only speak about the obvious need for such means, but also of the attitude the armed forces should have towards the citizens of the country: they should realize that they are there to serve the citizens, and that the citizens are not their enemies. Without the citizens the military would have no *raison d'être* nor subsistence: the citizens are the water without which fish cannot survive. The song warns against the abuse of power and suggests that those who hold the arms should always remember the purpose of their existence: it is to install peace and security, not to assist those who “bully the powerless.” The following linguistic features can be observed:

- prefix *i-* in *inchi* “country” (Standard *nchi*)
- use of Lingala phrase *miso nga* “[have your] eyes open”
- *-si-* is palatalized to *-shi-*: *ashipime* (next to *asi pime*) “he should not dare” (*kupima* is “to try” in Katanga Swahili while it means “to measure, to test” in Standard)
- spelling of *matsho* “eyes” (Standard *macho*), *rahiya* or even *rahiha* “citizen” (Standard *raia*) “citizen”, *sila* “weapon” (Standard *silaha*), *vidjidji* “villages” (Standard *vijiji*), *ku eshimisa* “to make respect”, the hiatus in *wa siho nguvu* “who are powerless” (N.B. the relative form *wasio (na) nguvu* is unusual for Congolese Swahili), *aita ishi* “it will not live” (Standard *haitaishi*)
- the negative copula in the present is not *si* but *aina* (Standard would be *haina* or rather *hana*, but this means “s/he/it has not”): *askari polise aina aduwi wako* “the policemen is not your enemy”; and *aiko* (Standard *haiko* means “it is not (here)”: *kazi ya politik aiko yenu* “politics is not your job/task”)
- class prefixes of the locative classes are used as prepositions: *mu nguvu* “in force”, *mu ukimia* “in silence”
- *-i-* is prefixed to some verbal stems *-ikala*
- lexical specificity: *fasi* means “place”, *ku tshunga* means “to protect, attend on”, also “to wait” (see later) (Standard *kuchunga* means “to herd cattle, to keep watch over”), *-pima* means “to try, dare” (Standard “to measure, examine”)
- French words that are used are *politik*, *polise*, adapted in spelling to reflect the pronunciation

The image of the African woman appears again in Marteau's song "Mama Afrika", composed on 7 May 2006:

Mama Afrika

Taa ya maisha yangu, mwanga ya matsho yako ina angaziya maisha yangu,
mafikili yangu ina zungulukaka paka ku shahuri uli nipa wakati mili kuwa mutoto,
mama wa Afrika uko mufano wa salama na mapendo.

Mama Ilunga Edoxie, uko njiya ya uhaki na maendeleo,
O mama yangu, ata niwe mukubwa namna
uta baki paka mama yangu,
na kihapo kwangu mita baki mutoto wako.

Mama mimi kama si we mimi singe kuwapo,
li tshukuwa mwezi kenda tumboni mwako,
li teswa sana-sana kwa ku ni zala mimi mama, mama wa Afrika.

Ndjiyani ya ospitali nvula gali ili piga,
kati ya nvula mama uli kuwa mweni hodari,
magumu gali-gali mimi mili zalikwa mama, mama wa Afrika.

Idjapo kuwa mili pata mafundisho mbali-mbali
mafundisho ili toka kwako wewe kila siku na kila wakati uli nyambiya,
mwanangu, si tamani mali ya watu, eshimu mali na mutu wowote.

Mama, mama wangu w'Afrika, akuna siku ata moja, we uli lala mimi mili angaika.
Mama, mama wangu w'Afrika akuna siku ata moja, mimi liliya mama uli furahi.
Mama kupitiya wewe wa mama wote wa ulimwengu
wa pokeye sifa, eshima na shukrani.

Mama au kukuwa paka mama wa ku mpishi,
kukuwa paka mama ku zaa na ku nyonyesha,
uli kuwa mushahuri wangu, mwalimu wa watu wote,
mama, mama w'Afrika.

Mama una baki na siri mku ju ya maisha ya mtu,
uwe nani wala nani apa duniyani paka upitiye kwa mama jo u itwe mtu,
mama mulango wa maisha.
Ku komala duniya bila mama magumu kabisa,
kuwa na mama ni sifa, heri na shangwe
kwani mu mambo zozote mama ana baki mama, mama, mama w'Afrika.

African mother

*The light of my life, the light of your eyes shines on my life,
my mind always turns around the advice you gave me while I was a child,
African mother, you embody peace and love.
Mother Ilunga Edoxie¹⁴, you show the way of justice and development,
Ah my mother, no matter how grown-up I am,
you will always stay my mother,
and I swear I will stay your child.*

*Mother, if it were not for you, I would not exist,
I stayed nine months in your abdomen,
you were in great pain to bear me, mother, African mother.*

*On the way to hospital, there was a heavy rain,
in the midst of the rain, mother, you were brave,
in great difficulties I was born, mother, African mother.*

*Although I got various lessons,
it was you who taught me, every day and every time you told me,
my child, don't desire others' riches, respect the property of everyone.*

*Mother, my African mother, there is not a single day when you would sleep while I
was in trouble.*

Mother, my African mother, there is not a single day when I cried and you were happy.

Mother, through you, may all mothers of the world receive praise, honor and thanks.

*Mother, you were not only a mother in the kitchen,
you were not only a mother to give birth and to suckle,
you were my advisor and everybody's teacher,
mother, African mother.*

*Mother, you have a deep secret of a person's life,
no matter who, here in the world you are only called a person once you go through
your mother,
mother, the door to life.*

*To stay in the world without mother is very hard,
to have a mother is praise, fortune and joy,
because in anything mother stays mother, mother, African mother.*

The song is homage to Sando Marteau's real mother (*Ilunga Edoxie*) but equally to African motherhood as such (*mama w'Afrika*). Sando Marteau has written similar songs about the father ("Shauri ya baba" or "Kazi ya baba") and parenthood remains a constant reference in his poetry, in both the literal and the metaphorical sense. "Mama Afrika" is attached to the concrete image of a mother and to the condition of mothering a child, but it goes on to elaborate the central role of the mother/woman in the running of family and society: the woman's role is not restricted to the kitchen (*mpishi*), bearing children (*kuzaa*) and suckling them (*kunyonyesha*), but also to promoting justice and development (*uhaki na maendeleo*) and maintaining peace and love (*salama na mapendo*). The mother is an adviser (*mushauri*) and teacher (*mwelimu*), she is the "door to life" (*mulango wa maisha*)—an expression that can be taken both literally (the physical act of childbirth is a passage through a "door") and morally (no one can become a person without passing through the upbringing and socializing process provided by the mother). On the linguistic side, the song displays the following features:

- /l/ in place of /r/ *mafikili* (from *-fikiri* "to think", Standard *fikra*)
- habitual suffix *-ka*: *ina zungulukaka* "it always/usually goes around (something)"

- lexical specificities *paka* “only”, *mpishi* “kitchen” (Standard *jiko*; *mpishi* means “cook” in Standard Swahili), *kenda* “nine”
- hiatus bridged with silent <h> *kihapo* “oath” (Standard *kiapo*), *mushahuri* “adviser” (Standard *mshauri*)
- the subject concord of the 1st person singular is *mi-*: *mili kuwa* “I was”, *mili pata* “I received” (Standard *nilikuwa*, *nilipata*)
- classes 1 and 3 have the prefix *mu-*: *mutoto* “child” (Standard *mtoto*), *mufano* “example” (Standard *mfano*)
- the locative is used as copula: *uko*, e.g. *uko mufano wa salama na mapendo* “you embody (literally, you are an example of) peace and love”
- intervocalic /l/ is used: *ku ni zala* “to bear me” (Standard *kunizaa*), *nvula* “rain” (Standard *mvua*), *ku komala* “to finish”, here “to stay” (Standard *kukomaa*)
- /g/ is used instead of /k/: *gali* “harsh, fierce” (Standard *kali*)
- absence of /h/: *eshimu* “respect” (Standard *heshimu*), *au kukuwa* “you were not” (Standard *haukuwa*), *apa* “here” (Standard *hapa*)
- *ku* is used as preposition *ku mpishi* “in the kitchen” (Standard *jikoni* or *katika jiko*)
- use of *(n)jo* in the meaning of “and then”: *paka upitiye kwa mama jo u itwe mtu* “until you pass through a mother, then you are called a person”
- concords are not observed strictly: *mambo zozote* “anything” (Standard *mambo yoyote*)

In Sando Marteau’s poetry, women are not only mothers and wives. He also sings about prostitutes and victims of sexual violence, ostracized by family and society. The following song, composed on 9 December 2009 in Lingala, describes the life of a prostitute:

Zela zela

Zela zela vie na nga ya kozela, ko zela se na nzela oyo na yebe te oo.

Bananga to kola ba zui ya bango mibali, ngai ko zela ko zela se na nzela.

Ba leki na sima ba zui pe ya bango, ngai ko zela, ko zela se na nzela.

Vie ya ki ndumba, ngai na lembi, ko zela mibali ya bato ngai na lembi.

Waiting, waiting

Waiting, waiting, my life is waiting, waiting on a road for someone I don’t know.

My age-mates have all got their husbands, I am only waiting for someone I don't know on a road.

My juniors also got theirs, I am waiting, waiting on a road.

Life of prostitution, I am tired [of it], waiting for other people's husbands, I am tired [of it].

The song also has a Swahili version:

Tshunga tshunga

Tshunga tshunga maisha yangu ya ku tshunga, ku balabala ule mishi famu.

Rafiki tuli komala naho wote wan'olewa, mimi paka ku tshunga ule mishi famu.

Wamudogo wana zalikwa nao wan'olewa mimi paka ku tshunga ule mishi famu.

Maisha ya ku tshunga mimi mina tshoka, wa bwana wa watu mimi mina tshoka, maisha ya bu ndumba mimi mina tshoka.

Waiting, waiting

Waiting, waiting, my life is waiting, waiting on a road for someone I don't know.

The friends I grew up with have all got their husbands, I am only waiting for someone I don't know on a road.

My juniors were born and also got married, I am only waiting, waiting for someone I don't know.

Life of waiting, I am tired [of it], other people's husbands, I am tired [of them], life of prostitution, I am tired [of it].

The song shows the fatigue of a woman whose life consists of waiting—a waiting for someone she does not know and who will never be hers. Not only is she dispossessed of social relations in this way, lacking a husband and a family; she is also dispossessed of her time, because all her age-mates and even women younger than herself are ahead of her in life, having completed the duties and passed through the life stages appropriate for a woman of her age (such as marriage). She is excluded from the company of peers, and she is not even given the honor that she would normally get due to her age (in relation to her juniors). The woman's complaint describes a specific attitude to time: all her life is waiting, it is an immersion in a limitless

expanse of time, but all that time is unproductive, empty. It is not and cannot be filled with meaningful experiences. The men she meets remain anonymous to her. They are not a promise for her future life; in fact, her profession precludes her from a meaningful future life as a wife and a mother of a family. The perception of futility is intensified through the constant repetition of the word *kozela* (or *kutshunga* in Swahili) “to wait”. The linguistic proximity of the Lingala words *ko zela* and *nzela* creates tension in what the song describes. *Nzela*, “road,” stands for a progressive, linear view of life, seeing it as a movement on a road that always progresses from one stage to another. On the other hand, *kozela*, “waiting,” is the very opposite of this movement—it is exclusion from this movement.

Linguistically, the song is already interesting because it was composed in two languages. For Swahili, the following features can be observed:

- hiatus is bridged with silent <h>: *nahō* “and they” (Standard *nao*)
- /h/ is dropped in both spelling and pronunciation *ule mishi famu* “whom I don’t understand” (Standard *yule nisiyefahamu*)
- the negative relative is expressed through the demonstrative *ule* “that” (Standard *yule*) and the negative prefix *-shi-* (standard *-si-*): *ule mishi famu* (Standard *nisi(ye)fahamu*) “whom I don’t know”
- the 1st person singular is *mi-*: *ule mishi famu* “whom I don’t know” (Standard *nisiyefahamu*), *mina tshoka* “I am tired” (Standard *nimechoka*)
- locative prefixes are used as prepositions *ku balabala* “on/at the road” (Standard *barabarani* or *kwenye barabara*)
- /l/ is used in place of /r/ *balabala* “road” (Standard *barabara*)
- spelling *-tshoka* “to be tired” (Standard *-choka*), *-tshunga* “to wait” (Standard *-chungu*, which means “to herd (cattle), to keep watch”)
- lexical specificities: *ndumba* “prostitute” (Standard *malaya*)
- class 14 retains the prefix *bu-*: *bu ndumba* “prostitution” (Standard class 14 prefix is *u-*, e.g. *umalaya* “prostitution”)
- employing both stative and passive suffixes in *-zalikwa* “to be born” (Standard *-zaliwa*)

Conclusion

Sando Marteau’s songs show the entire broad range of the linguistic continuum of Lubumbashi Swahili. In general, he remains close to Swahili bora in his lyrics. He usually employs the

standard concords for class 2 (*wa-*) and 8 (*vi-*), but class 11/14 shows a great variation in his work. Spelling is possibly his the most noticeable idiosyncrasy: he uses a disjunctive orthography, untypical of Swahili (both in East Africa and in the DRC), and his spelling reflects influences of French, presumably because the author learnt to spell French through official channels, but not Swahili. Lexically, his language is very pure; Sando Marteau meticulously avoids code-switching and French loan words. This is not an accident but a conscious attitude: over the years, I have often received a text message from him asking me how to say in Swahili certain words, which he knew in French, and he said it was important for him to express things in Swahili in his songs. This article has analyzed these linguistic features in five songs in Swahili, authored by the artist: “Baraka yetu,” “Afrika ni maziwa,” “Nguvu ya inchi,” “Mama Afrika,” and “Zela zela”/”Tshunga tshunga.”

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